



**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE RESOLUTION 207 TO
MEMORIALIZE THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS TO ENACT FEDERAL
LEGISLATION DESIGNED TO PREVENT ELDER ABUSE**

**By Karen Schrock, President and CEO, Adult Well-Being Services
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Resolution 207 which supports federal legislation to prevent elder abuse. I was an appointee to the Governor's Task Force on Elder Abuse and am pleased to hear the presentation of Elder Abuse Task Force Member Ms. Roxanne Chang.

There is no question that federal legislation is needed to prevent elder abuse. Currently, support for state and community efforts to prevent elder abuse is limited by scarce resources and fragmented systems.

The City of Detroit 2002 Needs Assessment reported 128,400 persons aged 60 and older living within the City of Detroit. Many of these seniors are frail, isolated and at risk of elder abuse. This year, the Southeast Michigan Council on Governments issued a demographic forecast for Southeast Michigan which estimates that by 2030, 37% of all households in Southeast Michigan will have at least one person over the age of 65. What this means, of course, is that as our population ages, many more elders may be at risk of harm.

Adult Well-Being Services (AWBS) is a community-based, nonprofit organization that was founded fifty-four years ago in Detroit. We provide comprehensive services to older adults, adults with developmental disabilities and seniors with mental illness. We provide a range of case management, outreach, prevention, caregiver support, guardianship and treatment services annually to more than 5,000 older adults who live in Southeast Michigan. We currently are funded by the Michigan Women's Foundation to provide information and workshops on elder abuse to older women living in Detroit.

The Michigan State Police and others report that the majority of elder abuse is committed by family members. One of the most effective ways to prevent elder abuse is to provide education and support to family caregivers, because the stress of caregiving may increase the risk that they will be involved in abuse. Recognizing this, the final report of the Governor's Task Force on Elder Abuse recommends increased resources for caregiver support and respite services.

AWBS has a strong caregiver support program, where we provide information to caregivers, hold monthly support group meetings and provide respite for caregivers. We recently surveyed participants of our caregiver support program and 100% of the respondents said that support groups improved their lives.

They can now ask others for help where they did not do so before. They have learned new ways to provide care. They have learned new ways to manage behavior. They report feeling less stressed, guilty and isolated and less likely to become angry. These caregivers now understand they must take time for themselves and do make time for themselves. Such programs do work and are needed to prevent elder abuse.

AWBS also provides responsible guardianship for those vulnerable adults who do not have family members or anyone else to turn to for help with managing their finances and even their long term care needs. As a nonprofit organization, we are not in the business to scam anyone, as some unscrupulous guardians or family members do; we are transparent and dedicated to helping older adults.

We had one client referred by Adult Protective Services who was sleeping in the living room in a hospital bed that was wet and filthy. When one of our staff visited her, she had a black eye that she said came from her brother who hit her with his fist. She had to have five surgeries on her eye.

Another guardianship client referred by Adult Protective Services had a son who was reportedly a drug dealer. The people to whom the son owed money broke into the house of our elderly client and beat her up. When one of our staff went to the house to take her to a medical appointment, we found her locked out of her house, by her son. Both the son and the neighborhood in which she lived were dangerous. We made sure she found safe shelter.

Clearly, our older adults deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. They deserve to live their lives free from abuse, and instead, filled with happiness, companionship and fulfillment.

The good news is that elder abuse is preventable. A critical first step in preventing elder abuse is passage of the Elder Justice Act. It would bring national attention to the issue and provide the quality, quantity and availability of information and resources that are needed to prevent elder abuse. It would focus on increasing prosecution of crimes against elders. It would fund special programs to support underserved populations, including seniors living in Detroit. We need this type of comprehensive approach to elder justice if we want to do everything we can to ensure that all senior citizens age with dignity, security and peace.

We urge our elected representatives to support House Resolution No. 207 which calls for the enactment of federal elder justice legislation. Thank you.